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FEIJÃO, FEIJOADA, AND BUCHADA

To translate "feijão" with our commonplace word "beans" is to detract from its dignity. Feijão (pronounced fay-jowng) is the staff of life, the food of rich and poor alike. It exists in many varieties and different colors, and may be prepared in different ways, but however prepared it is essentially Brazilian, and can never be expressed with the mere word "beans".

The two principal varieties of feijão are preto (black), and mulatinho (mulatto — a light grayish brown, becoming reddish when cooked). The former is the preferred variety in Rio de Janeiro, the latter in Pernambuco, and generally throughout the North. Feijão preto is really black. The beans themselves, and the liquor in which they are cooked, are as black as ink; and some people dislike it because of its color. I, personally, have always considered it delicious, and feel that the Cariocas (natives of Rio de Janeiro) show good sense in preferring it. But the mulatinho is very good also.

Feijão is planted, usually in the same field with corn, the corn rows being wide apart, with three or four rows of feijão between. It is a bush bean, and the pods are too tough and stringy to use for string beans. (The Brazilians often plant in their gardens suitable varieties of beans for string beans, but the product is vagens, not feijão, vagen being the general word for "pod". The country people, with the confusion of "b" and "v" that has always plagued the Iberian races, generally pronounce it "bah-zhy".) When the beans are mature, the plant is pulled up by the roots, and spread on the ground to dry. A rain at this time is a great hazard to the crop, and sometimes crops are completely ruined by excessive rainfall at the time of harvest; but as that is normally toward the end of the rainy season, most years there are enough sunny days to permit harvesting the crop in safety. When thoroughly dry, the plants are removed to a convenient piece of bare ground and beaten with a stick to break up the pods; afterwards the beans are freed of trash and chaff by winnowing, and put in sacks, ordinarily 60 kilograms (132 lbs.) to the sack. The crop is sold

to merchants or sepculators, who store it in large sheet iron vessels, each holding twenty or thirty sacks. It is not stored in the sacks, however, but poured into the vessel, which is then tightly sealed as a protection against weevils, soft yellow soap being the sealing agent in most cases. Usually it is sufficient protection simply to seal the vessels, but some people put at the top a little dish of carbon disulphide or similar insecticide, to kill any weevils that may be present. Kept in this manner, the product will remain good for a year, or even more; but without protection it will be ruined by weevils within a few months.

Feijão may of course be cooked in any sort of vessel, but is properly cooked in an earthenware pot with a small mouth, called a panela, which is customarily set directly on the fire, either wood or charcoal. Long cooking is essential; the feijão is usually put to soak the night before, then cooking needs to be begun early in the morning to have it ready at midday. It should be seasoned with some kind of meat, a piece of salt fat pork or of xarque, the dried salt meat of beef or goat; but any sort of meat will do. Also, when it is available, a part of a cabbage may be cut up into the pot, or a few pods of okra put in whole, or any other vegetable at hand; especially pumpkin, which is extensively cultivated of several firm fleshed varieties. Sufficient water is kept in the pot to provide a generous quantity of liquor, as this is almost as important as the beans themselves.

In the better class homes feijão is customarily served with rice, though farinha (cassava root, ground and dried, a little coarser in texture than corn meal) is almost always present on the table. (There is hardly ever a midday meal served in Brazil without these three elements, except in the homes of the very poor, where the rice is often lacking.) The feijão may be served by the side of the rice, or on top of it, according to individual taste. I once visited a boarding school where the pupils were classified as em-cimistas (from em cima, on top) and ao-ladistas (from ao lado, by the side). The rice takes up a part of the liquor, but very often one puts on some farinha also, to take up the rest of it. Brazilians don't seem to mind mixing up the food on the plate. I knew an American lady once who had a Brazilian guest at dinner. She served the plates at the table, being careful to ^{put} each item of food in its separate

place on the plate. To her immense disgust, the guest then poured farinha on top, and with his fork stirred the whole into one conglomerate mass before beginning to eat. Such a procedure is not at all uncommon among Brazilians of the Northeast.

At table, instead of changing hands with the fork, as North Americans are accustomed to do, the Brazilians follow the European custom, and keep the knife in the right hand, and the fork in the left, throughout all the principle part of the meal. According to their table manners, they may be classified in three groups. The first group is of those who use the knife to put the food on the fork, often piling it up and smoothing it down neatly before transferring it to the mouth. The second is of those who reverse the process, using the fork to place the food on the knife, which is then used for transferring it to the mouth, often appearing to go far down the throat in the process. The third group is of those who discard knife and fork altogether, using the hand for ^{shaping the} mixture of feijao and farinha into little balls, and transferring these to the mouth, farinha having been applied in sufficient quantity to give the mixture a proper consistency for this operation. Servants, and uneducated people in general, use this last method, and children are often taught by their nurses to eat in this manner, so that in after years they are inclined to revert to it at picnics, or other occasions when the amenities of civilized life are somewhat relaxed.

A feijoada is like feijão, only more so. It is a sort of stew, of which the most important ingredient is feijão. (The suffix "ada" indicates number or quantity. Thus an ox is a boi, and a herd of oxen is a boiada.) The more things you can put in a feijoada the better. It must certainly have fat salt pork (toucinho) and dried meat (xarque), but if available ham, tripe, pigs' feet, salami, or almost any sort of meat may be added, and in addition it needs generous quantities of vegetables, such as okra, cabbage, carrots, onions, maxixe (a sort of gherkin), and chuchuí (the chayote, or vegetable pear). All these flavors are blended by long cooking, and when properly made it is a dish fit for a king. In serving, the larger pieces of meat are generally removed and put in a separate dish, also the more bulky part of the vegetables; the smaller parts are left mixed with the beans; and one serves his plate with any or all of the ingredients, according to individual taste. A dash of good pepper sauce helps to bring out the flavor.

Back in 1941 I chanced one day to go into a restaurant in Recife for lunch, and saw on the menu "Feijoada Carioca". (The reader will remember that Carioca means "of, or pertaining to, the city of Rio de Janeiro.") A man sitting near me asked the waiter whether this feijoada was made with feijão preto, and having received an affirmative reply, ordered it, and I ordered it also. It was served in the individual baking dish, of about one quart capacity, in which it had been cooked. It must have contained almost all the ingredients mentioned; I distinctly remember tripe and pig feet. Rice and farinha were served with it. One needed no side dishes, and after doing justice to the feijoada I felt no desire for dessert. It was one of the most satisfying meals I have ever eaten.

I had been in Brazil for over ten years before it ever fell to my lot to participate in a buchada, for that is a dish made only on special occasions, and requiring a good deal of time and trouble for its preparation. The name is derived from bucho, in popular language the belly, but more strictly the paunch of a ruminant animal, in this case either a lamb or a kid. The addition of the suffix "ada" would make it possible to translate the name freely as "the paunch with all the trimmings".

To prepare this dish, a lamb or kid is slaughtered, and after dressing the animal the meat is cut into suitable pieces for stewing, and the paunch, or first stomach, after being properly cleaned, has its lower opening sewed together so as to make of it a sack, which is filled with a mixture composed of the other viscera, that is, the heart, lights, liver, melt, etc., ^{chopped fine,} the blood of the animal, and a generous quantity of rice, and properly seasoned. After being stuffed tightly with this mixture the opening is sewed together, and the bag is placed in a large cauldron with the meat, and boiled or stewed for several hours. At the table one is served a portion of the meat, and a slice cut from this "bag pudding", of which naturally the bag is eaten as well as its contents.

To appreciate a buchada, one needs to free himself from his prejudice against eating blood, a sentiment in which the majority of North Americans seem to share. I confess that I have never been able wholly to rid myself of this prejudice, though I

have often eaten dishes containing blood during the time of my residence in Brazil, on the theory that when in Rome one ought to do as the Romans do, at least within reasonable limits. On one occasion I was a guest at the home of a Brazilian friend, together with another American. On the table was a dish of sarapatel, made from the liver, lights and blood of pork. I accepted some of it, but my fellow countryman, when it was passed to him, refused, and turning to me said in English, "You know what you're eating, don't you?" "Of course," I replied, "what of it?" He was horrified, and said, none of that for him!

Actually, in North Brazil the blood of practically all animals slaughtered is saved, and used in one form or another for food. When a Brazilian cook goes to kill a chicken, she grasps it firmly and holds it securely with her arm, while she cuts its throat with a knife, and lets the blood run into a bowl. If her foreign mistress has instructed her not to cook the blood, she probably cooks it anyway, and keeps it in the kitchen for herself, wondering doubtless at the queer customs of the foreigners. Sometimes the blood is used in making the gravy, but oftenest it is coagulated and cooked in with the chicken, where it so closely resembles the liver in color, texture and taste that foreigners often eat it without suspecting that that is what they are eating. We never had it on the table in my home, but when I was a guest in Brazilian homes I made it my rule to eat whatever was set before me, without asking too many questions about it. When I knew that a certain dish was prepared with blood, it was a bit hard to get it down at first; but I came to the point that I thought little about it.

The opinion seems to be pretty general in North America that Brazilian foods, or all Latin American foods, are highly seasoned. However, while they make freer use than we do of certain seasoning agents, such as garlic and bay leaves, their food on the whole is no more highly seasoned, I believe, than our own. It is seasoned differently, but not more highly. And of things hot with pepper, it is my opinion that there are fewer such dishes used in Brazil than in the United States. Pepper is abundant, but is used rather sparingly as a general rule. Two seasonings much used, which are strange to most North American palates, are cumin and colorau, the latter a mixture of paprika with something else, and which gives a red color to many dishes.

There are exceptions, however. In 1947 I was in Bahia, as it is generally called, (Really São Salvador, capital of the State of Bahia) with a friend. Negroes form a large percentage of the population of the city; and there were big fat black women seated on the sidewalks in the down town area, selling something that looked something like a muffin, with a brown sauce which was applied at will by the customer from a vessel nearby. Since it seemed to be a characteristic element in the life of the city, my friend and I decided to try one. He helped himself generously to the sauce, but some instinct warned me that it was going to be hot, and I applied it sparingly. And while I am fond of pepper, and can take more than most people, I found mine quite hot enough to satisfy me, while my friend, going full speed ahead with his, was soon ablaze all the way down to his stomach. I could not resist laughing at him. It is funny when it happens to somebody else.